



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

3rd Sunday of Easter | Year C



Raphael: Christ's Charge to Peter, "Feed my lambs". 1515



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer

*God of mercy,
You wash away our sins in water,
You give us new birth in the Spirit,
And redeem us in the blood of Christ.
As we celebrate Christ's resurrection
Increase our awareness of these blessings,
And renew your gift of life within us.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God forever and ever.*

[Second Sunday of Easter, Morning Prayer, Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours, ICEL, Catholic Book, New York, 452]

**Catholic
Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ The entire Easter season is a remembrance made present of Christ's Paschal Mystery—the life, death, resurrection, ascension and sending of Christ's Spirit to the world. An entire season is set aside for this reflection.
- ▶ Today's liturgy has several themes embedded within it—participation in the Paschal Mystery, sharing the Good News, reflection on Peter, the Shepherd of the Church. There is much grist for reflection.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 5: 27-32, 40b-41

- ▶ The Sanhedrin denied responsibility for Jesus' death. Tension between Christians and the Sanhedrin mounted.
- ▶ The Sanhedrin was the highest religious and civil Jewish court that presided over everyday affairs of the Jewish citizenry.
- ▶ The Sanhedrin was a seventy one member body comprised of the priestly class. Capital crimes were reserved for Roman authorities, but every day affairs of Jewish people were legislated by the Sanhedrin. Court was held in the temple precincts from morning until evening each and every day.
- ▶ Imagine the consternation of the court when the Apostles ignored their authority by preaching the Gospel in the temple courtyard!
- ▶ The Sanhedrin considered the Apostles heretics of Judaism. The Apostles charged the Sanhedrin with Jesus' death and promised divine retribution for the death of Israel's messiah, savior and herald of God's forgiving mercy—for the death of Jesus, the Christ.
- ▶ Needless to say the Sanhedrin responded quickly to the threat to their authority. The Apostles were jailed but they miraculously escaped.
- ▶ The Apostles were not deterred; their courage was rock solid. They preached the Gospel regardless of the consequences.
- ▶ No obstacle—no civil or religious authority--would thwart their God-given mandate to continue the mission Christ inaugurated—the establishment of the kingdom of God.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ How can this reading be a word for you today?
- ▶ In what way, if any, would you ever be called upon to stand in opposition to religious or civil authority?
- ▶ In what way can this reading be applied to the normal day to day living experiences of Christians?

Second Reading: Revelation 5: 11-14

- ▶ The Book of Revelation looked to the future day when the present suffering of this world would be no more. The book was written as a word of consolation for those who would one day face persecution and hardship.
- ▶ John places an image of feast and banquet before his readers. Believers feast with the slain Lamb at the eschatological [end times] banquet.
- ▶ Allusions to Passover abound in this reading. Jesus is the Paschal lamb who was slain—a common image for the evangelist.
- ▶ This lamb was victorious over the beast sin and evil.
- ▶ This lamb evokes memories of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the lamb who was slaughtered for the sins of many.
- ▶ The allusion to Passover is a reminder of the freedom, deliverance, passage Jesus made from death to life, the freedom from slavery to sin he accomplished once and for all by his sacrificial death. This allusion to Passover is a reminder that we too make a similar passage each and every day that we take up our cross and follow Christ.
- ▶ This reading stands as a reminder that believers on earth celebrate the eschatological banquet—the heavenly liturgy—with the saints on earth and the saints in heaven. Our earthly liturgy echoes the liturgy of heaven. It is rehearsal for it.
- ▶ The creatures and elders mentioned are participants in the liturgy of the evangelist’s day and age.
- ▶ The grand vision of liturgy is set forth as a word of strength and consolation to those who would one day be asked to give their lives for others and for the sake of the Gospel.
- ▶ The four living creatures and the elders represent participants in the liturgy of John’s own time.
- ▶ The liturgy of Revelation is a reminder to us that our participation in liturgy—then and now—is participation in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus—his life, death, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit.

- ▶ We break the Bread of Life; we consume the Lamb of God and in the process we too are broken and consumed.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ In what way are you presently living the Paschal Mystery of Christ?
- ▶ In what way have you experienced passage from death to life, from slavery to freedom?
- ▶ What does liturgy have to do with that passage?
- ▶ Why is liturgy important when it comes to living the Paschal Mystery—living the passage from slavery to freedom?

Gospel: John 21: 1-19

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ The author of John chose to use the big catch story in the context of a post resurrection appearance thus signifying that Jesus is indeed alive and that their apostolic endeavors were a result of the power of the risen Christ—not their own efforts.
- ▶ The disciples are gathered in community—right where Jesus wanted them. They had not yet been sent to evangelize the world.
- ▶ The apostles lowered their nets and came up empty.
- ▶ Peter recognized the Lord and jumped out of the boat and swam to him.
- ▶ Morning arrived and Jesus instructed them to lower their nets again. Their catch was overflowing. They caught one hundred and fifty three fish.
- ▶ Jesus then ate a meal of fish with them.
- ▶ In an earlier appearance they recognized Jesus because of his wounds, in this vignette they recognized him because he did what he always did with them in his earthly life—he ate with them and shared life with them. He fed them with his presence.
- ▶ Jesus then instructed them to go out and establish the kingdom. The number

of fish represents the universal mission they were sent to accomplish. All were welcome.

- ▶ The nets did not break—just as the church holds many different types of people, it remains strong. Though many different types of people are in one house, the house is unified.
- ▶ The drama then turns to Peter. His three-fold rejection of Christ is healed by Christ's three-fold reconciliation of him. Jesus heals and restores Peter and affirms his role as Shepherd—leader of the flock.
- ▶ Jesus asks Peter if he is willing to die for his flock. Is he, Peter, like Christ, ready to die a martyr's death? Are we?



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example.

- ▶ What one thing struck you the most about this story?
- ▶ In what way can you relate to the “big catch” in your life?
- ▶ Have you ever had the experience in which every effort came up short, dead-ends were experienced at every turn, nothing seemed to work out, only to find that waiting for the Lord to show the way opened doors you never thought possible? What did you learn from the experience?
- ▶ Consider the possibility that Jesus is asking you to lower your nets. What fish might he be asking you to catch--perhaps a spouse, a loved one, a co-worker, a group? What do you need from Jesus in order to catch the fish? What obstacles stand in the way?
- ▶ What struck you about the Peter segment of this story? Where is the good news for you?
- ▶ In what way might Jesus be asking you to lower your nets? What fish might he be asking you to catch?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

#1. Whenever we stand up for what is right in the face of any opposition we are living in the spirit of this reading. My friend Pete was a foreman in a steel factory up north. He was inspecting steel headed for the airline industry. His supervisor told him to approve the inspection without having inspected it because they were behind schedule. Peter refused. He said that the metal was going to the airlines and required inspection. Pete was fired for doing what was right.

I often think about Pete when it comes to issues like this. I have seldom been placed in a situation in which I stand in opposition to the church or to civil authority. I believe such opposition is a unique gift of the Holy Spirit—indeed it is the gift of courage. However, we grow in that gift by standing up for what is right in the day-to-day events that are the routine part of life.

For example, every time I openly refuse to listen to racial jokes I am standing up for what is right. It takes courage to refuse to listen; we do not want to hurt the feelings of the joke teller, we do not want to call attention to ourselves.

I have a neighbor who is a very good Catholic, attends daily Mass and is very active in my former parish. One very negative trait of this neighbor is that she loved telling racial jokes. We on staff were faced with a difficult decision every Monday morning as she was a member of the group that volunteered at the church on Mondays. The way I dealt with her was to remove myself from the situation thus removing the possibility of having to deal with what I knew was coming. I greeted her and quickly went about my business.

What I should have done, what we all should have done is go to her privately and tell her how offensive her jokes were. She probably would have been mortified. She most assuredly would have stopped. We were all afraid of hurting her feelings because she was otherwise a very sweet lady. I often think of that situation and pray for the grace and the courage to stand up and say “no” if ever faced with a similar situation. If I am trustworthy in small things, then perhaps if I am ever called to oppose any authority for the sake of the Gospel I will have the courage to step up to the plate regardless of the consequences. Such are the implications and the inherent mandate of this reading.

#2. Everyone has their “one thing” in life—their one challenge that supersedes all other challenges. My challenge is living with the mental illness of a loved one. It will either facilitate my ticket to heaven or cause my rapid descent to the other place. My life is a series of “letting go’s”—passage from slavery to freedom. When I obsess about the next treatment, fix, or strategy to deal with this issue on a day to day basis I am in slavery because in truth I am powerless over this illness. The sick child refuses help; the state forbids us to help. What then, is my response?

The serenity prayer is the only prayer that makes sense: “Lord, grant me the serenity to

accept what I cannot change, the courage to change what I can and the wisdom to know the difference.” It is the last part of that prayer that baffles me...I am never sure when to step in and when to let God be God.

Herein lays the power of the paschal mystery. When I join my life to the ongoing paschal mystery that is playing out in the drama under my own roof, I acknowledge Christ’s presence with us in it. I acknowledge that he suffers with us. I acknowledge that he not only suffers with us but with very other family who is experiencing similar sorrow—especially those who are not yet awakened to the reality that Christ sits in their living rooms as well.

When I truly let go I am never disappointed and usually the next step to take becomes obvious. I am a living testimony to the power of the paschal mystery made present in the liturgy in our lives--this illness has not crushed me as I so many times believed it would. When I drink from the Cup of Life, when I allow the Blood of Christ to run through my veins, I pray not only for myself and the world around me but I pray for the very sick child who cannot pray for himself. I am given the grace to withstand the onslaught of this demon disease. Liturgy has everything to do with the experience of the Paschal Christ in my life—it opens my life to his presence and power and it sustains me when the oppressive shadow of darkness seems overwhelming.

#3. I easily relate to the story of the fish and the full nets. I experience the greatest joy when I “go out” to share the good news. I have been given the privilege of sharing the Gospel in many different places. I have learned that even though the Church is diverse, we are nevertheless extremely unified. Everywhere I go the people of God are concerned about the same issues—being good disciples and living the Christian message to the fullest.

I have had the privilege of sharing at the banquet of so many people’s paschal lives. I find that the gift that was given to Peter is freely given to us and propels God’s people to share it with others. One story in particular comes to mind.

I was asked to do a workshop in a northern community. The family I stayed with shared how they lost a child to suicide not before he took the life of another person. His story made national news. They shared with me their lifetime struggle with this child. I look back and in many ways they prepared me for what was to soon enter my own life. They shared how they were sustained by faith and how they witnessed to Christ’s love to the CNN reporters that camped out at their doorstep. They welcomed them into their home. They refused to allow the darkness of the event to overshadow their faith in Christ, or to prevent them from sharing faith and hope with others.

The witness of their lives was the net. The fish were all those who were swept up by the love and magnanimous assurance of Christ’s forgiving love this family witnessed to. There are so many ways we are called to go out and catch the big haul. We need only be tuned into what God is doing in our lives and yield to it.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Eucharist Series
Sacraments
Cross/Paschal Mystery
Symbols of Bread and Wine

Evangelization
Church
Sacrament of Baptism
Revelation II

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

EUCCHARIST SERIES: Part III

Easter is to the year what Sunday is to the week. Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. For the next four weeks we will break open the four parts of the Mass. Today we will focus on part III, the Liturgy of the Word.

SACRAMENTS

The Paschal Mystery is made manifest in the Easter season. Easter is an appropriate time to reflect on the way in which Jesus continues his saving mission in the midst of his absence. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of SACRAMENTS.

CROSS/PASCHAL MYSTERY

The Paschal Mystery is made manifest in the Easter season. Easter is an appropriate time to reflect on the mystery of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Spirit to which we are given access in the liturgy. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY.

SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE

The Paschal Mystery is made manifest in the Easter season. Easter is an appropriate time to reflect on the mystery of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Spirit to which we are given access in the liturgy. We experience the paschal mystery of Christ in the Eucharistic liturgy in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the Eucharistic cup. Thus today's doctrinal session will focus on the SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE—the symbols of the Eucharist.

EVANGELIZATION

Today's Gospel is a mandate to go out and establish the kingdom of God and preach the Good News to all nations. The Church teaches us what we need to know about this very worthy enterprise. Today's session will focus on EVANGELIZATION.

CHURCH

Today's Gospel affirms Peter as Shepherd of Jesus' flock. The Acts of the Apostles relates the story of the development of the fledgling Church. It logically flows that today's liturgy invites further reflection on the CHURCH. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of CHURCH and its STRUCTURE.

SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

The Easter season is a time of reflection on the baptism of new converts to Christianity and the renewal of our baptism. Through baptism we die and rise with Christ. It is an appropriate Easter reflection especially as we renew the promises we made or that were made for us at baptism. Thus, the doctrinal session today will focus on the sacrament of BAPTISM.

REVELATION Part II

What better time is there than Easter season to focus our attention on God's revelation to humanity? The second reading particularly focuses on God's revelation. Today is the second in a two part series on REVELATION.